

replaced by a turgid belly laughter of distended cloth. We cannot suppress a smile of recognition as we see and hear the concrete stretch against the resistance of its membranous skin. The unashamed eroticism of these columns is a welcome release from the dry concerns of a dead geometry. The humor in this work is infectious, like the mocking grotesques of the medieval masons that slip between the all-too-serious concerns of load and geometry. Laughter is a form of lubrication, an emotional graphite that releases the friction of the suppressed.

(Dubbed) Postscript

In a postscript to "The Aleph", Borges questioned the initial euphoria of his vision with the thought that it must have been a "false Aleph." This was due to some subsequent, esoteric research on the subject which located the "true" Aleph inside "the pillar of a mosque from the seventh century."

Evidently the true Aleph was invisible and could be located only by a "busy hum" discernible when one put an ear up against the column. The memory of Beatriz also fades as the Aleph slips from view into the opacity of the stone column; the beautiful face that carried the promise and memory of the metaphysical and now mythical point that gave transparency to all things. "I myself am distorting and losing under the wearing away of the years the face of Beatriz." [10] The lament of Borges is for the passing of an age of great and beautiful visions. Its highly visible frequency has now been absorbed by the low, resonating murmur of the dub. As a player of this dark medium, Mark West is always careful to remind us of its origins in the slippery regions of our embodied soul. The location of the light Aleph is that its vision is made with nothing more than the afterglow of the things of this world compressed into a point. The desire for transparency is met with a fleeting vision. Possibly, the dark Aleph shows a more inclusive and forgiving way.

--DAN HOFFMAN

1 Jorge Luis Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories*, 1933-1969, E.P. Dutton, New York, 1978, p. 23.

2 I thank Manuel Antonio Baez for this and other precise observations regarding the metaphysical tradition and its relationship to vision.

3 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1978, p. 74.

4 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 167.

5 Ibid., pg. 167.

6 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 1978, p. 88.

7 Jean Paul Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo DaVinci*, Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 1 also thank Mr. Baez for suggesting this piece.

8 "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia", an essay by Roger Callois in *October*, the *First Decade*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987, p. 73.

9 Roger Callois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" p.73

10 Jürgen Habermas quotes Georges Bataille in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Jürgen Habermas, the MIT Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 225.

11 "Blind Variation and Selective Retention", an essay by Donald T. Campbell in *Evolutionary Epistemology, Theory of Rationality and the Sociology of Knowledge*, Gerard Radnitzky and W.W. Barley, III, Open Court, LaSalle, Illinois, 1987, p. 92.

12 Günther Wächtershäuser, "On Light and Life, And the Origins of Perception", *Evolutionary Epistemology*, p. 138

13 Ibid., p. 124.

14 "The Pinel Eye" in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, Georges Bataille, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1985, p. 83.

15 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988, p. 11.

16 "The Pinel Eye" in *Visions of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, Georges Bataille, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1985, p. 11.

17 Ibid., p. 83.

18 Borges, *The Aleph*, p. 30

19 Ibid.

Future Exhibition

Dagmar Richter

"Berlin-Los Angeles," an exhibition by Los Angeles based architect Dagmar Richter, is an exploration for alternatives in the cultural and urban patterns. Using these two extreme ends of urban spectrum, she seeks to delineate a feminine language for architectural formalism and urban strategies. Her intent is to mediate the differences between two urban realities—the fragmentation of Los Angeles and statism of Berlin—by introducing horizontal interventions and interconnections that can embrace the disjuncture of former and the limitation of latter.



1837 Tenth Street, Bernadette Fox REPORTS 4

Publication

REPORTS 4

\$3 Newspaper

FUTURE STRIP: Jan van Bergen
SUSPENDED MANHOLE and Other Projects: Andres Blum
THE LEFT-HAND DRIVE HOUSE: Azby Brown
STRUCTURES OF NOMADICS/ Umbrellas, Huts and a Tower: Dennis L. Dolens
FREE SPACE AND TRANSITION/1837 Tenth Street: Bernadette Fox
BLUE HIGHWAY: Alastair Gordon
CONSUMING VISION: Dan Hoffman
ARTIFICIAL PERSONALITY/Buildings with Motives: Ken Kaplan and Ted Krueger
HOMELESS (clothes) 1992: Lois Nesbitt
THE PIT: Peter Nover
FOR GROUNDCRAPPER: Martin Price
THOMASSON/the "Super-Art": Rika Sekuma
EXQUISITE CORPSE: Graham Shane
GORDON MATTA-CLARK/Architecture as Alchemy: Frederieke Taylor



Publication Order Form

Individual Issues			
2/3	\$8 + \$1 for postage	\$	
11	\$3 + \$1 for postage	\$	
Subscription: 1 year (4 issues)			
Individuals	Professionals/Institutions		
U.S.A.	\$12	\$18	\$
Can./Mex.	\$12	\$18	\$
Others	\$12	\$18	\$
Total			\$
Name _____			
Street _____			
City _____	State _____		
Zipcode _____	Country _____		
STOREFRONT FOR ART & ARCHITECTURE 97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10012			

Supports

Individual and Corporate

Individual Contribution

I would like to make a contribution of \$_____ to STOREFRONT. My contribution is tax deductible to the full extent of the law, and the check is made payable to: **STOREFRONT FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE**

Name _____	
Street _____	
City _____	State _____
Zip code _____	Country _____
Telephone _____	

STOREFRONT FOR ART & ARCHITECTURE
97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10012

CONTRIBUTORS (\$30 or more)

Brock Adler, Anderson & Schwartz Architects, Todd Ayeung, John S. Bales, Sam Beck, Roger Beerston, Mercedes Benavides, Robert Beyer, Byron E. Bronston, Denuté J. Brzdas, Cornelia Carey, Victor Cassidy, In-Souk Cho, Sherman Clark, Jeffrey Cox, Peter Davis, Terry Lee Dill, Andrew S. Dolkart, Sidney Eisler, Barbara Ess, Karen Fairbanks, Ming Fay, Wendy Feuer, Clark Fiedler, Warren Frayer, Richard Gluckman, Curtis Ginsberg Architects, Leon Golub & Nancy Spiero, Vera Graal, Paul Gugliotta, Arthur Harbo, Caspar Henselmann, Dave Homer, James F. Horton, Reinaldo P. Gutierrez, Lawrence M. Guterman, David Hanewall, Donald Harvey, Nancy L. Hall, James Horton, Caroline Hotelling, Marshall Hyde, J.F. McAllister, Huzela Irani, James R. Jackson, Robert Kanak, Bridget Kennedy, Jongrub Kim, Jonathan Kirk, Andrea Kirsh Consulting, Johannes Markus Knoops, Daniel A. Kooniewski, David Koralek, Brent Kowalski, Paula Krauss, Michael Kreps, Frederique Krupa, Won Kyu, Jean H. La Marche, Armond LeGardeur, Neil Logan, Linda Lindroth & Craig Newich, Wayne A. Linker, Lucy Lippard, Lawrence Lowengruber, Charles F. Lowrey, Dan Maciejak, Scott Marble, Elizabeth Martin, James McCormack, Jeffrey Miles, Amy B. Miller, Joan Mitchell, Marsha & Robert Mitnik, George Moore, Erik Morr, Stephan Moser, Mouse King Foundation, Chris Neville, Katsuka Oki, Dan Peterman, Jody Pinto, Alicia Impetale Pollé & Quintilio Pollé, Cindy Preston & Jim Goss, Linda Pollak, Dagmar Richter, Mr. & Mrs. L. Rosa, Mary Virginia Rickel, Larry Rouch & Co., Lari Schendinger, Jefferson Schierbeck, Tony Schuman, Sol-Arc, Michael J. Shapiro, David Sherman, Michael W. Smith, Barbara D. Stebbin, Judith E. Stein, Chip Sullivan, Marilyn Symmes, Kim Tanzer, David Wells, Robert Werthamer, Wood + Design, Jack Yager & Lily Stokker

DONORS (\$50 or more)
 William Baker, Ashok Bhavnani, Charles Blomberg, Eric Breitbart, Wormi Choi, Susan Chorprenning, Jeff & Cynthia Cox, Randall J. Cude, Gary Cruz, Joseph A. De Pace, Wendy Evans, Deborah Freedman & Ben Ledbetter, Maria Del Rio, May Gardner, Richard Gluckman Architects, Hansa Haacke, Douglas W. Hollis, Teh Chung Hsueh, Janell + Suhomoto, Peter Lund Jensen, John Johansen, Viviana Frank & Frank Rohnitzky, Andrea Kahn, Ruth

Kaufman, Sheila Kennedy, Andrew Knox, Carr Kuoni, Erik Levine, Armond LeGardeur, Loren Madsen, Amerigo Marras, Jennifer McGregor Cutting, Suzanne McDaniel, Alyssa Melnick, Elizabeth K. Meyer, Gary & Joann Miller, Mary Miss, Philip Mitropoulos, Wendy & Mike Nadler, James Noll, C. Shayne O'Neil, Ryall Bishop Porter Architects, Ben Posel, Peter & Clevon Ryan, Edgar Lee Rawlings, Resolution: 4 Architecture, Wellington Reiter, Robertson & McNulty Architects, Mel & Louise Roman Howard Rosenthal, Toshio Sasaki, Daniel Schmitt, Harry R. Simco, Nelson H. Spencer, John Steigenswald, Frederieke Taylor, Karen Van Lengen, Vandenberg & Lesky Architects, Dore Vika, Dennis Adams & Jody R. Walker, Paul Warhol, Lawrence Weiner, Beth Weinstein, Michael Manfredi & Marion Weiss, Connie Wirtz, Henry Zemel

SUSTAINERS (\$100 or more)
 Siah Armajani, Olga & John Balch, Elsie Becket Inc., Michele Berfomen, Jenny Caldan, Howard M. Cohn, Curtis Cravens, Maria Del Rio, Dirk Denson, 1100 Architects, Jackie Ferrara, Marc Freidus, Gifford Foundation, Paul Friedberg & Doni Shahar, Leslie Gill, Dan Graham, Janis Hall, Henry Smith Miller & Laurie Hawkinson Architects, Louise Hoffman, Kristin Jones & Andrew Gornel, Kuss & Zweigand, Kenneth Kaplan & Deborah Forman, Craig S. Konyk & Matilda McQuaid, Ralph Hueston Kratz, Ed McGowan, Max Protech, Harold Rivkin, Robertson & McNulty Architects, Lee H. Skolnick Architecture & Design Partnership, David Smiley & Lauren Kogod, Kit Yin Snyder, Peter Solagay, Don Tapert, Jack Taylor, Franco Mattini & Anna Thorndorff, Voornanger & Associates, Troy West, Adrienne E. Yost

SPONSORS (\$250 or more)
 Gordon Gilbert, Louis Muller, Gilbert P. Schafer, Christopher Scholz, Studio Partnership Architects, Susana Torre

PATRONS (\$500 or more)
 Karin Baumen, Richard Haas, Yaron Hecker, Steven Holl, Eylan Kaufman, Phyllis Lambert & Canadian Center for Architecture, Richard Plunz

BENEFACTORS (\$1,000 or more)
 David W. Serment, Rowland Miller & Eleanor Bingham Miller

FOUNDATIONS

Graham Foundation.
 The Greenwall Foundation
 The Jerome Foundation
 The LEF Foundation.
 The Silverweid Foundation.
 The Andy Warhol Foundation.

Organization

STAFF

Kyong Park: Founder/Director
 Shinn Neshat: Co-Director
 Stephen Korn: Program Consultant
 David Hanewall: Publications
 Barbara Gauder: Graphic Design
 Howard F. Seligman: Treasurer
 Paul Bustos: Exhibition Installation
 Sung Joo: Exhibition Installation

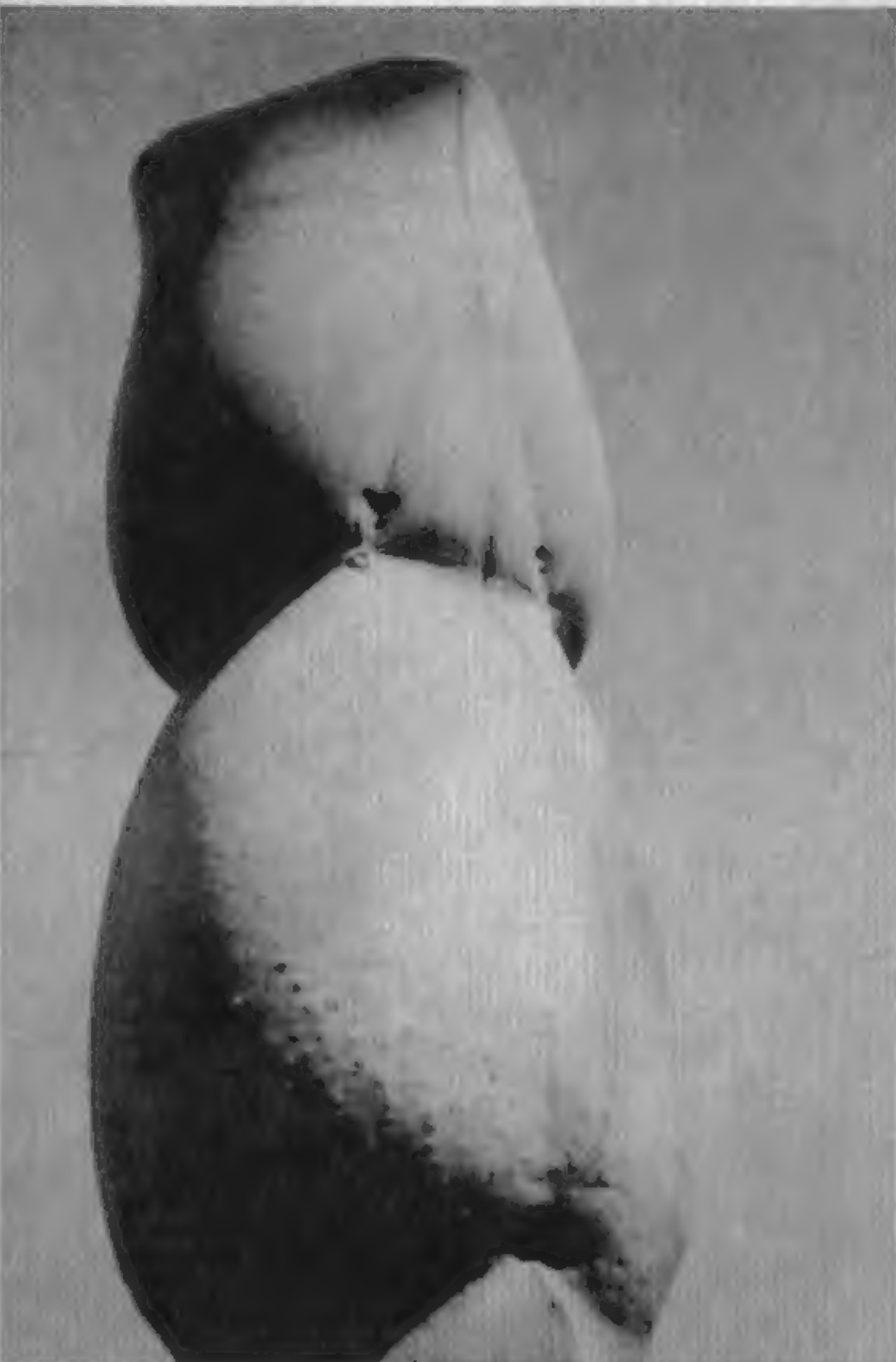
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Elizabeth Diller
 Dennis L. Dolens
 Alastair Gordon
 Dan Graham
 David Hammons
 Buff Kavelman
 Richard Plunz
 Lucio Pizzi

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Karl Barwick
 Peter Cook
 Chris Dercon
 Richard Haas
 Steven Holl
 Toyo Ito
 Nam June Paik
 Michael Sorkin
 James Wines

Pressure Buildings, Mark West



PRESSURE BUILDINGS AND BLACKOUTS
 Mark West

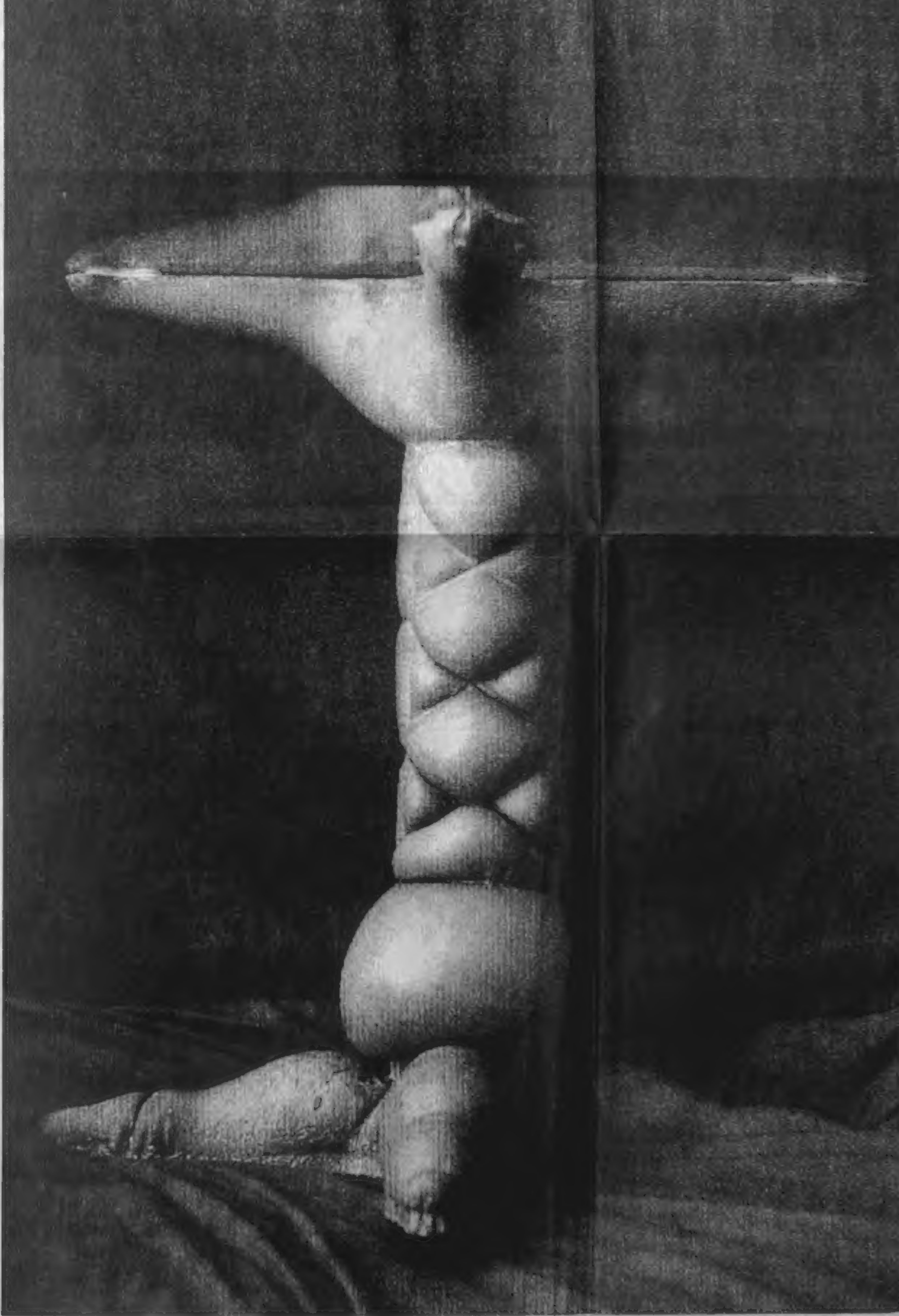
STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY, 10012.

Mark West

PRESSURE BUILDINGS AND BLACKOUTS



Pressure Buildings and Blackouts is an installation/exhibition by Mark West. Pressure Buildings, a site-specific installation of West's system of forming concrete by using flexible and permeable fabrics, will be constructed within the exhibition space and project out onto the facade of Storefront itself is analogous to the rigid form works that traditionally shape concrete, from which West's concrete will come out into a free form on the facade. Blackouts, a series of drawings made by erasing and blackening collaged images, will be exhibited inside. The intent of project are to remove the frameworks that restrict physical formation (Pressure Buildings) and visual observation (Blackouts), and to engage art, architecture and technology simultaneously.

PRESSURE BUILDINGS

For the past four years, Mark West has developed a method of forming concrete by using a fabric tension membrane in place of the traditional plywood forms. Using high strength industrial fabrics that are both flexible and permeable, he has

been able to produce the forms that retain the original liquid state of concrete. The result are entirely new territory of forms for architecture and a potential to "soften" the rigidity of constructed environments

The key to his method is the fact that liquid is most efficiently contained by a tension membrane (as opposed to the wooden boxes used in traditional formwork technology). In the formwork made of fabrics, the weight of concrete deflects in accordance with gravity to naturally create the exact tensile for a highly efficient and resilient, structure. It is worth noting that the structure in traditional rigid wooden formwork, serves solely to inhibit the deflection of these forms under the hydrostatic pressure of the wet concrete. A high price is thus inevitably paid when liquid concrete is forced into the planar geometry of these wooden containers.

With water-permeable fabric membrane the water-cement ratio of the placed concrete is reduced, thus producing a stronger member than from using wood forms in the final architectural form. These experiments by Mark West foresees architecture whose geometric determinants are expanded to include those dictated by random events, and by so called chaotic form and geometry.

The use of fabric lets gravity to shape concrete, more specifically the dead load of material itself. Fabric lets the material to find its own way, and allows the liquid nature of "wet" concrete to express itself in the final architectural form. These experiments by Mark West foresees architecture whose geometric determinants are expanded to include those dictated by random events, and by so called chaotic form and geometry.

BLACKOUTS

Blackouts are a series of drawings by erasing. West first starts with collages made of found photographs and drawings and then redraws them by blackening them with graphite. The graphite works over the original images beyond their recognition, and blends and shadows them into a field of images and shapes bound to each other almost endlessly.

But Blackouts are more than simply erasing and blending of images. They erase the authority of perspective system in the delineation and representation of the world and its images, and even by-passes the system of multi-foci that offers separate views simultaneously. Suggested here is the use of indeterminacy and blindness as a way of seeing things, and that the blindness caused by removing light shone upon the objects—the lighting principle of the perspective system that illuminates all objects visible or to be viewed from a single point—may bring forth object's own presence and light, and create further seeing in the darkness through their transparency. The question raised here is does the traditional system of illuminating and seeing really shows everything (The ceramic pottery of Kyoro period in Korea were made to be seen in darkness or under the moon).

Blackouts no longer questions the finding of things that are not yet seen, but seeing things in a different way. With the visible proliferated more than our capacity to see, to see now begins with what not to see, therefore the blindness, and to see more than what is visible requires their transparency. Being erased in Blackouts are not the objects but the system, reducing its lines and structure of sight into a field of transparency and mutation. With the structure of authority now invisible and the center of perspective removed, objects now overlap and fuse into each other into a field of independence and interdependence. Dead is the center of vision, replaced by the periphery of vision.

One concrete yet free (Pressure Buildings) and the other visual yet blind (Blackouts), they together question traditional rigidity in the making of the forms and seeing of the world. Both are projects to explore more than to oppose, and to add rather than simply denounce. The link between the two is to escape the mold of physical and visual, and to see and make in dark with vagrancy.

This project is made possible by the generous support of:
The Greenwall Foundation
The Jerome Foundation
The National Endowment for the Arts

SEPT. 26-OCT. 31
 1992

GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY-SATURDAY 12-6 PM
 OPENING RECEPTION: SEPT. 26, SATURDAY, 6-8 PM

STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY, 10012. U.S.A. TEL: 212.431.5795 FAX: 212.431.5755

Consuming Vision: The Work of Mark West

by Dan Hoffman

LIGHT ALEPH - DARK ALEPH

In his story entitled "The Aleph," Jorge Luis Borges speaks of "one of the points in space that contains all other points..." This is the Aleph, "the only place on Earth where all the points are seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blurring." [1] Borges' attraction to the Aleph is an attraction to the possibilities of vision itself, the idea that universal knowledge can be accessed through a kind of seeing that makes all things transparent to themselves. The Borges of the story longs for this vision to recapture the object of his desire, the beautiful Beatriz. The fact that Borges, the author, was blind only adds to the poignancy of the tale. In this light Beatriz can be understood as vision herself and the bright (and impossible) dream of the world that she brings for Borges. The dark and narrow cellar where Borges encounters the Aleph underscores the difference between the "times" of our (blind) bodily condition and its transcendence through the illumined vision of enlightened thought. Vision and beauty have historically assumed a powerful combination that has assigned an aesthetic to metaphysics, an aesthetic that Borges savors in the story with the delicate and lamenting memory of an old love.

Our interest in seeing all things clearly has placed considerable emphasis upon the eye and vision, the most acute of the senses. The analysis of vision and the inner workings of the eye has founded metaphysical systems in a quest for clear models of understanding that would lead to conceptual knowledge of the absolute. Understood in this way, the absolute, or "truth," is an all-encompassing transparency of the world mediated through the visual mechanism. Although the Aleph of Borges is a vision of this truth, the historical Aleph is actually divided into the conditions of the light Aleph and dark Aleph. [2] The manifest certainty of the former is contrasted with the elusive uncertainty of the latter. If not in light, then how is the dark Aleph to be known? Does it open itself to us in a singular, brilliant flash or is it accessible to us by more peripheral, or even furtive means? If the light Aleph is eminently locatable in a point, is the dark Aleph locatable at all? Borges does not speak of the dark Aleph but one would suspect that it is not far away, for the depth of things is not only understood through the light of vision or certainty. This "depth" is the fertile soil of embodied circumstance from which a sense of things emerges, the surround from which the perspective of the Aleph is unearthed. It is the very "life-world" that we exist in from day to day, a world whose banality often masks the extent of its profound being. This banality is the background of the story, the seemingly ordinary life of unfulfilled passions, locked doors and empty streets. This is the world that the light Aleph illumines with its brilliant transparency and focus. The dark Aleph offers another understanding, one that approaches from the underside of things, compounding opacities to a sublimity that spirals beyond our comprehension.

What has caused us to favor the light Aleph and its vision as the metaphor for knowledge? No doubt the precision of the eye was inspirational for its ability to locate constructions such as a geometry between the mind and the physical world—a metaphysical connection that maintained its precious balance until the beginning of the modern age with its emphasis upon abstract construction as the foundation for knowledge. This emphasis displaced the balance of the metaphysical connection that sought to mediate between mind and body, or construct or world. The historical remains of the metaphysical connection of mind and body has come to us in the form of perspective, which remains the dominant forum of visual representation in our culture despite the problematic claims to its truth. Its position has been affirmed largely through the dissemination of imbedded perspectival devices found in visual media such as the lens and the flat screen. Accompanying this advance, however, has been the persistent and sometimes furtive reminder that there is always something not seen, that there is a "pre-existence to the seen of a given to be seen." [3] Though the light Aleph reports to see all things clearly, it is not evident from this view that desire itself is visible. This un-seen aspect, the "stain," as Lacan calls it, infects our presumptions of clear seeing as knowledge. It is that which impels our vision and yet is invisible to us except in the form of an incidental trace. It is always elusive, leaving its mark as a disturbing reminder that the unconscious is always implicated in that which we gather around ourselves in vision. Merleau-Ponty refers to another aspect of the not-seen in the form of the shadow that is necessarily part of the spatiality of sight: "We see that the hand pointing to us in [Rembrandt's] The Nightwatch is truly there only when we see that its shadow on the captain's body presents it simultaneously in profile." [4] For Merleau-Ponty "...to see an object, it is necessary not to see the play of shadows and light around it." [5] The light of vision is permeated by the tonalities of darkness, for within sight itself we find a virtual world of oppositions that give form to an image. Lacan gives another example of the un-seen in the phenomena of anamorphosis whereby an image is presented to view that is warped or displaced from a preferred axis of viewing. In the painting The Ambassadors by Holbein, two figures are presented to the viewer in a straightforward manner except for a rather mysterious un-formed area (stain?) before them that "appears to be flying through the air." [6] However, when one turns away from the picture and views it momentarily at an oblique angle, the figure of a skull emerges from the heretofore un-formed areas. The skull serves as a reminder of this "other" vision residing in perspective. We come to realize that the point of view that perspective offers comes through the displacement of all that is not shown to the oriented eye; that behind or within the "clarity" of perspective lies the inevitable dark component of the death, the dark Aleph. The skull emerges from the other terms. The vanity that causes us to not see its disturbing presence is in the very logic of the perspective point of view.

Something of this "death" is visible in the "unconscious" use of mediated technology today in the form of home videos, anamorphosis and dubbing. Its widespread distribution is now forcing us to confront what was so carefully hidden before. Our "vanity" is being exposed and eroded by a dark humor that cannot be suppressed.

It is the tenor of the age and Mark West plays it with abandon.

SURVIVING LOGIC

The dark Aleph is without this singular point of view. Rather, its function is to disperse vision from a unifying, metaphysical aspect. Many of the experiments of modern art have taken as their theme the questioning or de-fusioning of the unifying view. In Mark West's early drawings this questioning is flagged with the useful title, "Surviving Logic." Here he accepts the pervasive and pressing demands of the "logical" tradition of vision served up by the phenomena of perspective, yet seeks to undermine its very foundations through a manipulation of the means of its representation. "Surviving Logic", then, is a viral operation upon the perspectival code, one that feeds upon the powerful ordering of its host. These inversions take the form of cut-ups of found (perceptively generated) photographs which are manipulated further by erasing, or blanking out, various sections within them. This double, or "dubbing" operation, disperses the perspectival field and permits the injection of various images into one work. Building upon the techniques of Cubism and montage, where a single scene is approached from multiple points of view, the drawings of the Surviving Logic series make present a panorama of multiplicity where each detail lays claim to its own point of view. The double negation (cut-up-erasure) liberates the field of the picture, preparing it for an inclusive rather than an exclusive field of operations, a space for a bricolage of immense and minute proportions.

BLACKOUTS

In subsequent work, all vestiges of Cubist (cut-up) manipulations are erased. This comes as a result of the refinement of the erasure procedure by the so-called "blackout" technique where the cut-up photographs are painstakingly drawn over with graphite. In such a way a fine-grained darkness infects the tableau, distributing throughout an aura of perspectival depth without the unifying organization of a single point of view. One could say that the atmosphere of perspective haunts the scene wherein each particle of the drawing possesses its own genus of depth. The manipulation of the point of view shrinks and stretches objects out of recognition like a myriad of lenses coursing through the space of the image—an anamorphic field where things warp out of recognition. There is the disturbing feeling that we have sensed something of them before, an unsettling déjà-vu without the reward of a final recollection.

West is characteristically vague concerning his methods. But how does he achieve the fuzzy precision of his drawings? How is this fuzzy precision possible? How is he able to sustain such an intensity of invention? Considering the problem of his technique further, I have found it helpful to refer back to Leonardo's instructions on drawing in his Treatise on Painting. The passage is quoted in full since it bears an intriguing, but curiously inverted relationship to what one would suspect to be the drawing technique used in the Blackouts:

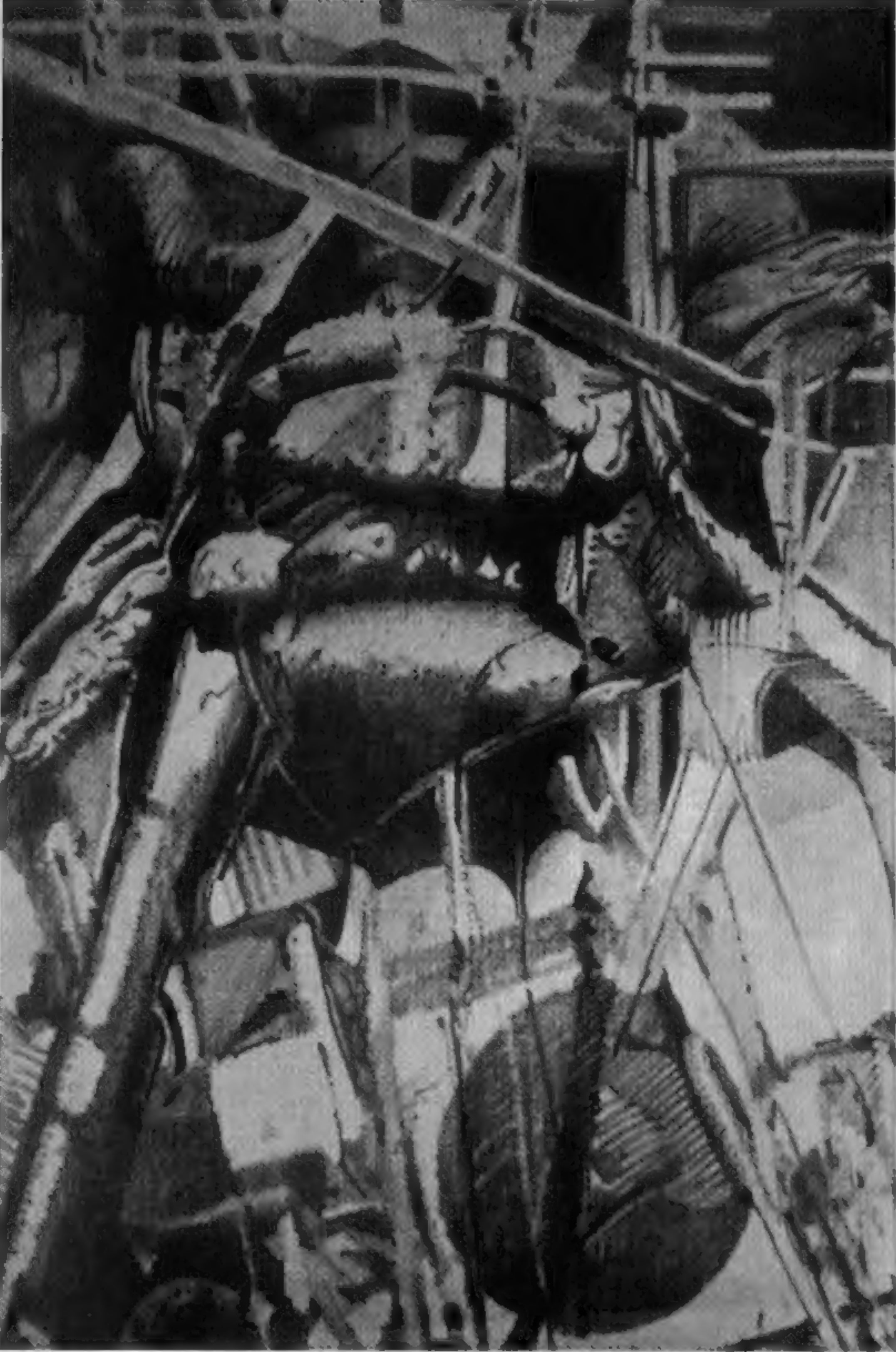
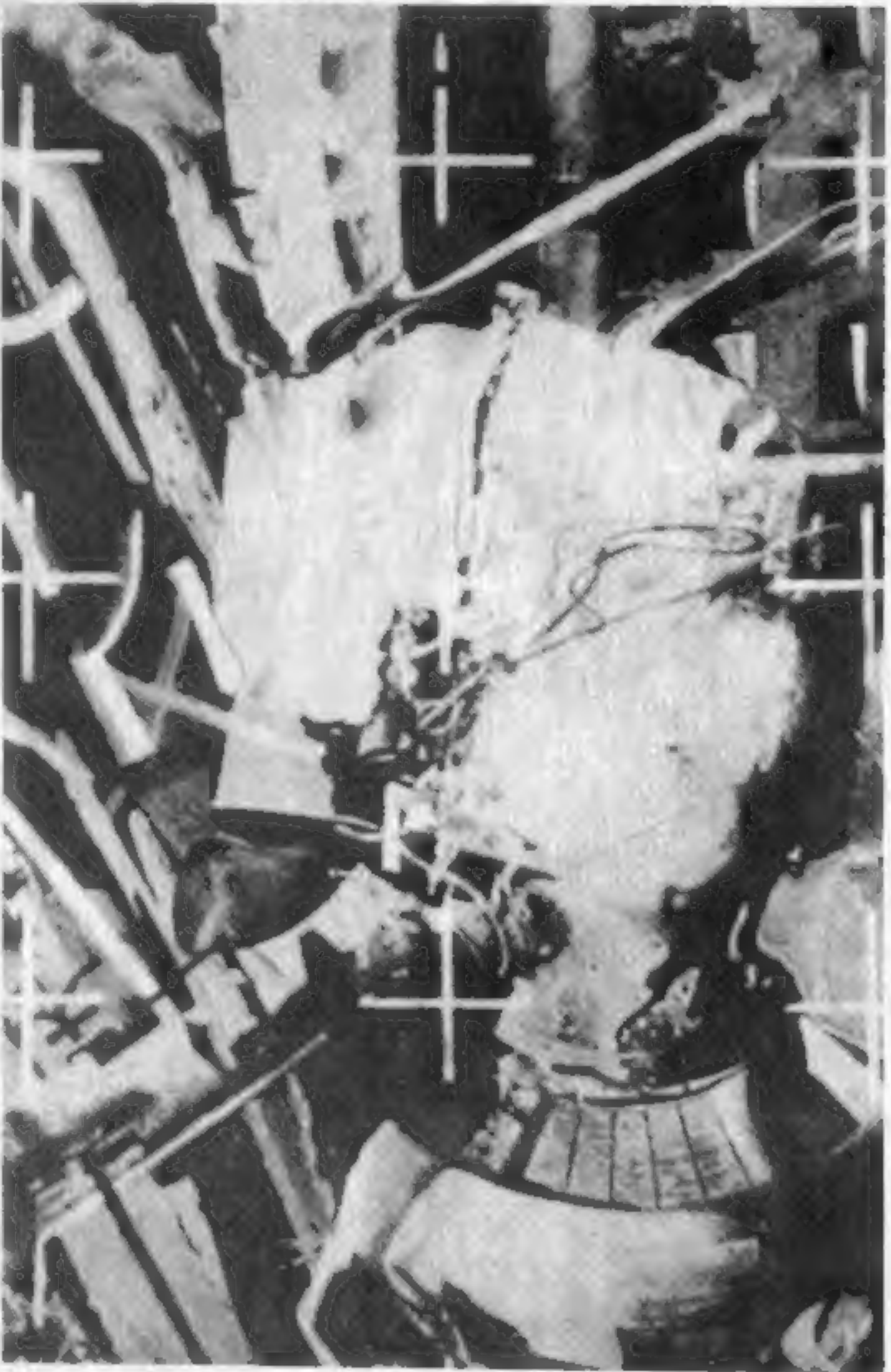
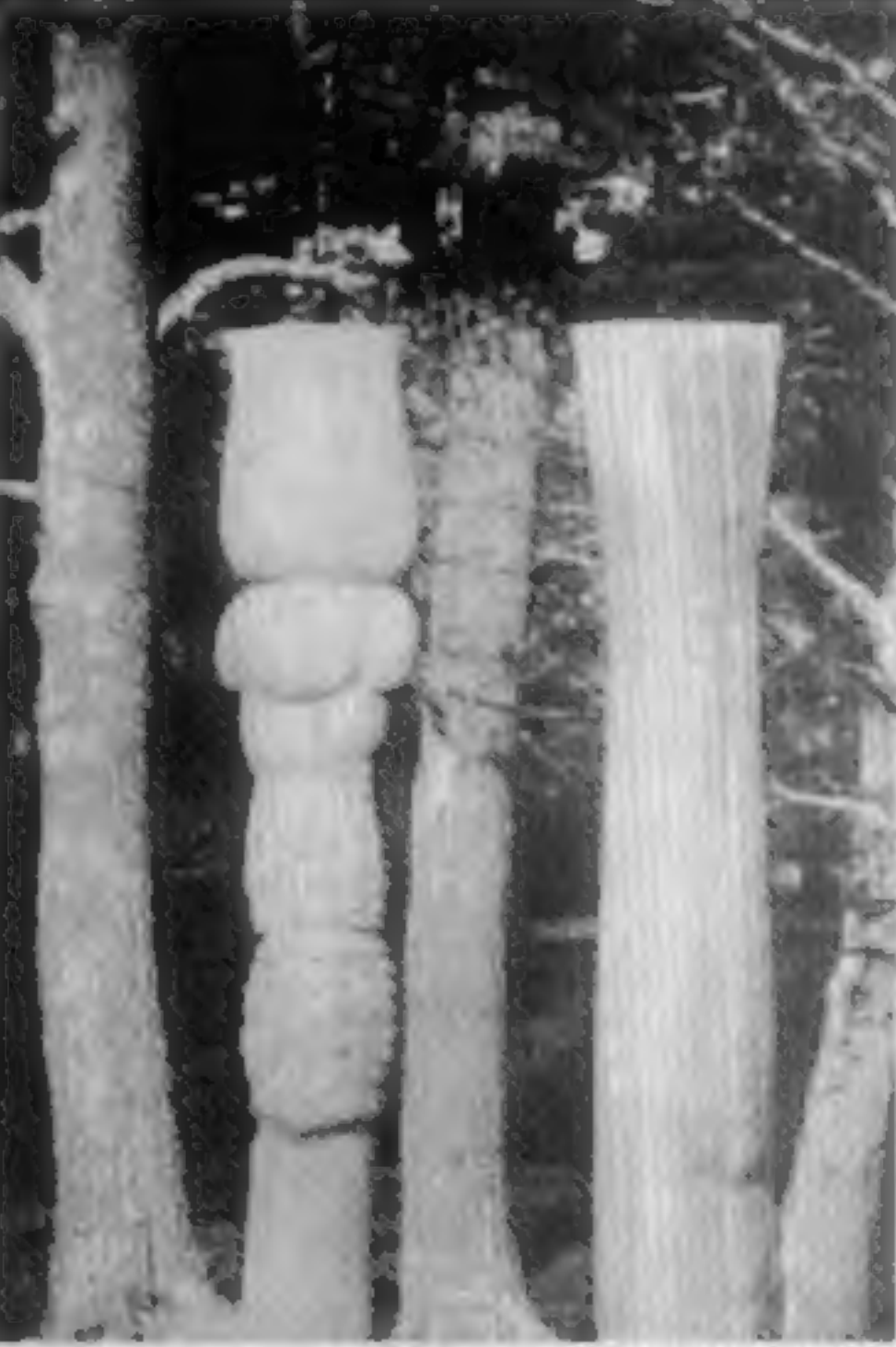
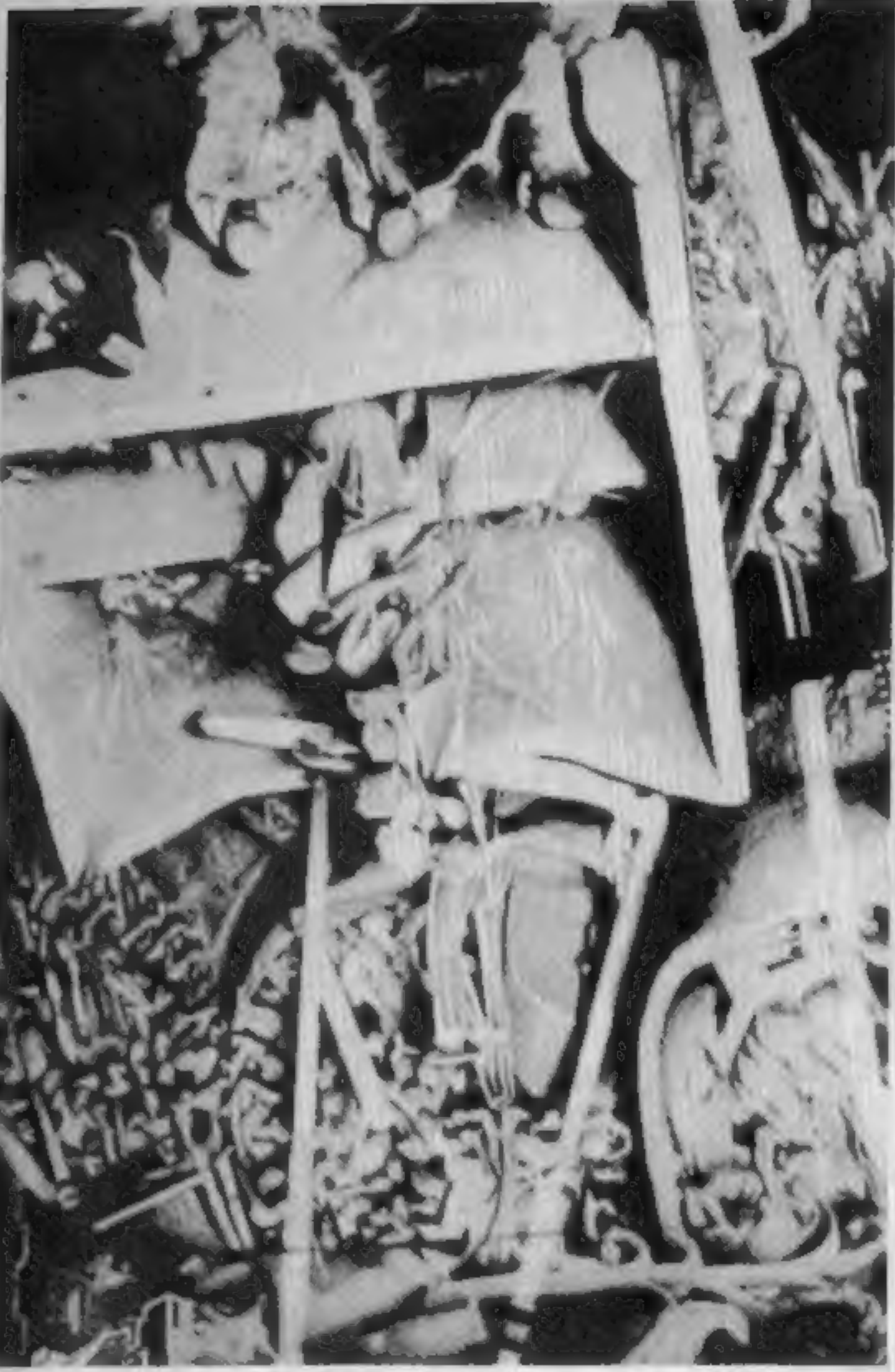
A Way of Developing and Arousing the Mind to Various Inventions

I cannot forbear to mention among these precepts a new device for study which, although it may seem but trivial and almost ludicrous, is nevertheless extremely useful in arousing the mind to various inventions. And this is, when you look at a wall spotted with stains, or with a mixture of stones, if you have to devise some scene, you may discover a resemblance to various landscapes, beautified with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, wide valleys and hills in varied arrangement; or, again, you may see battles and figures in action, or strange faces and costumes, and an endless variety of objects, which you could reduce to complete and well-drawn forms. And these appear on such walls confusedly, like the sound of bells in whose jangle you may find any name or word you choose to imagine. [7]

Leonardo asks us to begin with something indeterminate and arbitrary in vision such as a stain. The variety of imagined objects are then to be "reduced" to complete and well drawn forms (my emphasis.) West, on the other hand, begins with photographs that, by their nature, already possess fragments of completed form, which are then operated upon or "erased" to the point that the are just unrecognizable. Rather than reducing the photographic image, the graphite infection multiplies its readings through binding or mating it to other, adjacent images making the "image" continually slip out from recognition. The resulting drawing possesses a density of possible interpretations similar to that of Leonardo's stain. Indeed, it would seem from the title of his instructions on drawing that Leonardo himself is more intrigued by the "various inventions" to be found within the indeterminacy of the stain than in the completed, drawn forms. His fascination with the fertile field of the stain points to a latent, even psychological recognition that the stain can absorb projections of the desiring subject through its indeterminacy, not unlike the blotches of a Rorschach test. West plays upon this indeterminacy by bringing an image to the precise underside of recognition as an object. We have the sense of what the anti-figures of the Blackouts might be, but naming them is a slippery task that demands invention and interpretation.

DRAWING AS LUBRICATION

The choice of the method of partial erasure is significant, for graphite possesses a continuous gradient of tone from the lightest of greys (or light-black) to black itself. This enables West to match any tone on the surface of the photograph, thereby freeing up the rigid perspectival organization that binds it to recognition. The result is an aqueous field of vision that erases the edge-like distinction of an object to its surround—replacing the recognition of the object with a knot-like twisting and inversion. The fluidity of the graphite has no planar edges, its molecular structure encourages the continuity rather than the dis-continuity of surface and space. The lubrication of this edge of identity is similar to the experience of walking in a dark night where the visual limits of things are blurred. In this sense, the space of darkness is like a medium that disassembles the threshold of things, blurring the distinction of bodily limits. The space of darkness is filled. It touches us directly, enveloping and penetrating us throughout. We find that the ego is permeable to darkness and not to light. By immersing ourselves into darkness all manner of desires



are loosened and exposed, and here we begin to encounter the danger of the dark Aleph, for as opposed to the simultaneous transparency of the light Aleph, darkness opens towards an unending obscurity of body. It is a "descent into hell" [8] fraught with the temptation that through the "generalization of space and matter" [9] we can become one with all things. If there is a primal substance in West's universe, it certainly would be an ooze rather than a solid or void. The infinitude resolves itself in the substance of matter rather than the emptiness of a void. It is the very opposite of the pure statum of Descartes, that abstracted extension that enables the projection of the logic of vision and reason.

The Blackouts of Mark West offer us a revisioning of "truth" as symbolized by the light Aleph. Within the darkness of the Blackouts the unforeseeable replaces truth as clear foreknowledge. The transparent truth of the light Aleph is dissolved into a medium of becoming within which lurk shadows of doubt and wonder subversive to the control of objective vision (By objective I refer to the mathematical means of quantifying and locating objects in space.) The double action of drawing and erasure does not cancel out the function of vision, but rather anoints it upon itself. Here we find ourselves in a viscous medium of sight, inside a black eyeball of space, a place where the "burn" of potentiality and the proliferation of shades exist without brilliance, the dark side of Borges's Aleph represented in a dull, throbbing glow. We are fascinated and repulsed by West's precocious abandon, his desire to plunge into the underbelly of sight.

THE THEATER OF AMNESIA

Today "all things" include not only the biological realm of plants and animals and the geology of minerals, but also by-products of a delirious surplus of production. The lubricating fluid used in West's Blackouts must have an industrial strength as well as a decoding intelligence to loosen the bonds of use that determine every object of production. The "found" photographs that are the raw material for the Blackout procedure contain images of the productions of our recent pyrotechnic history—vast fields of debris accumulated from the many wars of this century. These delirious productions form a rich site for the consuming vision of West. Piles of confusion inspire the eye to multiple interpretations and open paths of speculation with which to spawn new organisms. These organisms, directed by genetic codes of violence imbedded in the material of excess production, begin to consume each other in vast feeding frenzies where one generation of production preys upon the next. The Blackouts are black holes which, in their collapse, attract unabsorbed surpluses of production into "ecstatic orgies" [10] of waste and debris. If there is a program to the architect's work, it is the construction of a system of digestion that consumes the images of the past and near present, reconfiguring them into recycled bodies of a spectral dimension. These drawings become a virtual "Theater of Amnesia" (the term is from a title of related work by West) where images are simultaneously produced and drawn outside the range of recognition and memory. By consuming images we forget their origins and make way for new configurations. In a sense, the Blackouts represent a desire not to see. Maybe we have seen enough and desire to circulate our vision into the obscure medium of the body so that it re-emerges stained by the waters of our forgetfulness.

DUS AND BLIND VARIATION

The desire "not to see" can be understood as an adaptation to an environment of proliferating images. It is not, however, a simple negation of vision, but a transformation of its received aspects as we find them injected into our cultural medium. By painstakingly blacking out or staining the surface of images within the space of the photographs each aspect of the image is reached into and touched. The intention of the touch is not to fix the image in space, but to stain it with another, more powerful code to break the habitual recognition of an object of vision. West points out that like the base lines of reggae, the medium of the Blackouts is absorptive to the many "samplings" of formal debris that can be played within it. The base is the prime genetic code common to all the samplings. (In his musical experiments West has claimed to have found the dub code common to the Bulgarian Women's Chorus, the chants of the Kalahari Bushmen and Frank Sinatra.) This master dub in the Blackouts is not developed consciously, for it would be impossible to pre-determine the sense of a work of such complexity. Rather, the code is found through a persistent and thorough trial and error method of "blind variation" [11] that seeks to find a way through the unthinking recognition of received images of production. In such a way a momentary integration is achieved, the tonality of sight is altered and another environment created.

This cycle of adaptation through transformation is similar to the theories of evolutionary epistemology as put forth by Karl Popper and others. In their view, knowledge is related to the process of active transformation of an environment through chance or "blind" mechanisms of change within an organism. "As Popper would have it: organisms by being active seekers are the active makers of their senses." [12] These newly developed senses direct the organism (or intelligence) towards new aspects of the environment which they colonize and therefore transform. Knowledge can be understood as a manifestation of a sense, a guide for behavior in the environment.

The trial and error method is considered as the explanation of an organism's need to deal with the continually emerging problems that confront it in its environment and is similar to my theories of how West operates upon his work. One proceeds here by a strategic circling around that which is unknown, an eye-hand meditation similar to the back and forth seeking or fleeing motion of organisms. This circulation of knowledge and vision through the random processes of

nature and the survival imperatives of the body illustrates the latent biologism in West's work. The dry metaphors of physics do not function here. In the Blackouts, we are immersed in a photo-synthetic medium observing the growth and decay of forms. Vision is no longer represented by the transparent intelligence of light, but is submerged into blind variation processes, the foundation for the intelligence of seeking organisms. Light is not necessarily the guide in this seeking. In one of the many myths inspired by science, Günther Wächterhäuser has recently speculated that the first sensory reaction of the earth's primal organisms may very well have been a flight from light rather than an attraction to its nutritional possibilities. He argues that these early organisms did not have the more complex feature of a protective, peripheral layer and by necessity sought the darkened environment of clay or sand for their habitation [13]—hence the darkness of the earth (and body) is haunted by a mud alive with organisms that flee from light. Intelligence is born with a tropism that is drawn to the protection of opacity rather than the destructive exposure of light and transparency.

Vegetal Erections

"Only human beings, leaving themselves away from peaceful animal horizontality, at the cost of the ignoble and painful efforts that can be seen in the faces of great apes, have succeeded in appropriating the vegetal erection and in letting themselves be polarized, in a certain sense, by the sky." [14]

—Bataille

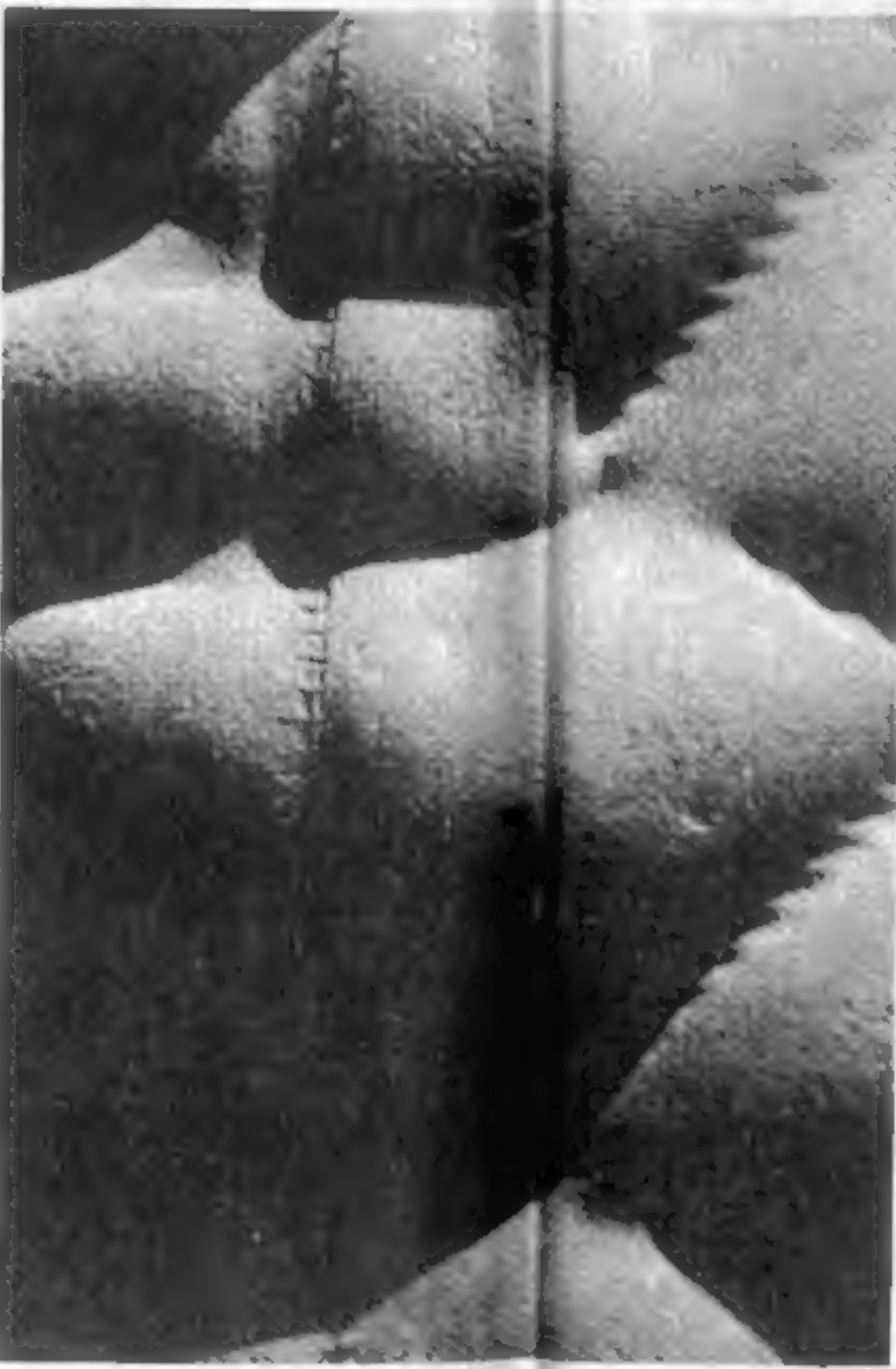
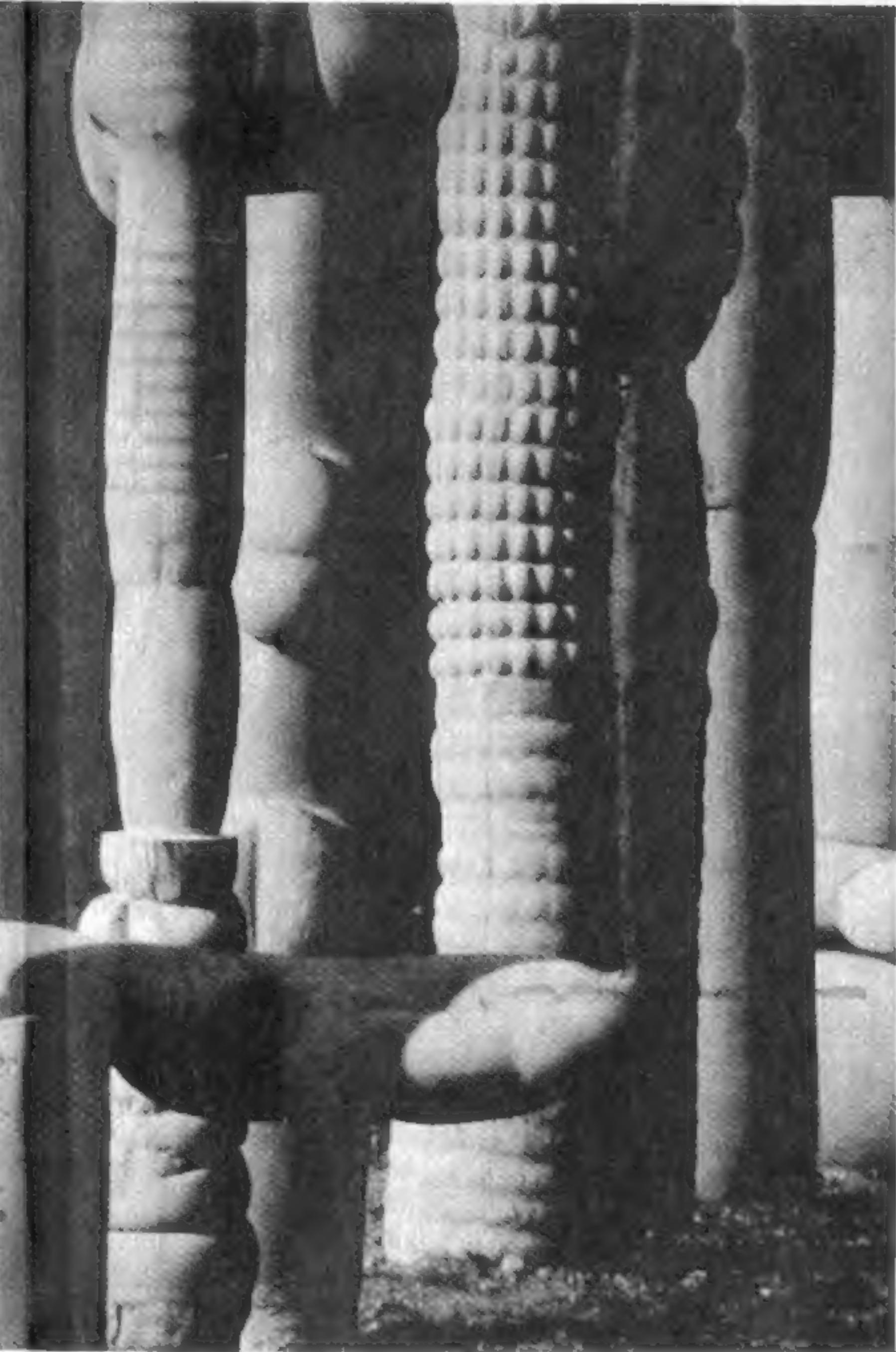
Biological preoccupation intensify in West's work as it moves from the Blackouts to the "Dr. X and Y" series. This shift is paralleled by a transformation in the technique of making the drawings. Photographs are no longer used as a departure point as they had been in previous series. In this most recent work the virtuosity of the hand has absorbed the spatial genetics of the Blackouts and can now draw in their absence. But has the photographic been removed altogether? Possibly the Dr. X and Y series are drawings over photographs of previous work projected onto a surface with a slide. Here we have work that feeds upon itself, one technique subsuming the other. The title of the series can be considered as another transformative play upon the inheritance of a previous, perspectival age, wherein the "X" and "Y" of Cartesian geometry are supplanted by the X and Y chromosomes of genetic structure.

What emerges from this process are West's latent obsessions with vegetal organisms and their sexual appetites. Technology has now entered the bloodstream—an occurrence long predicted by William Burroughs. No longer can we contrast biology and technology, industry and sea, human and vegetal, and production from waste. Bodily desire is now the great engine that seizes itself into various passages of the environment. West treats this ingestion with humor of a body circulating with the amorous juices of plants, their delicious chemistry loosening our most serious endeavors. "Drunkenness is the triumphal eruption of the plant in us." [15]

The "eruption" of the vegetal body in this most recent work has been accompanied by a movement towards the possibilities building in the cloth formwork experiments West has aptly named "Pressure Building." This form of erection is all the more notable for its close affinity to the drawings in the "Dr. X and Y" series. It is as if by becoming vegetal the drawings could actively grow themselves off the page. Like the Blackout technique, the simplicity of the basic system belies the virtuosity possible in its execution. As I understand it, a sack of cloth is held up by a scaffold and bound in various ways with rope. Concrete is then poured into the sack, thereby stretching the fabric. The fabric formwork is removed after the concrete has hardened (imprints of the restraining fabric and rope work can be seen on the surface of the concrete.) With this technique comes the possibility of liberating construction methods from the geometrically predetermined building systems that have historically dominated architecture. The spontaneity of this method is consistent with the architect West's interest in simple techniques that bring a level of blind variation to the work, for the number of ways of binding a cloth column seems limitless. Again technique becomes an obsession with West. In this case it is the primitive yet precise technique of knot tying that is the binding element in the construction. The mastery of the knot relies more upon a haphazard memory than upon a logical, geometric knowledge. We find it difficult to trace its twists and turns as the rope turns around itself. Like the Blackout technique the manner of its functioning confounds and compels us with its virtuosity.

We seem to be in the presence of a trick that twists the logic of vision, an ancient sleight of hand that curiously finds itself at home in the complex and dizzying world of polymer-cloth and biology. It is also impossible to predict with exactitude the interactive behavior of the concrete and the cloth as the formwork swallows its load. The form of the pour is an exact record of the distribution of the loads as they appeared at the concrete's hardening—a formwork process that records the pressure loads within it. The relationship between the liquid concrete, the plant cloth and the resisting rope are all registered upon the surface where tension recalls the force of turgidity, whereby the wall of a cell is distended to its limit by fluids within the cell itself. The tautness of the cell wall defines its shape and is a sign of the cell's life. Such is the scientific term to describe "the impeccable erection of plants" [16] referred to by Bataille. This erection is the brief, "explosive" growth along the vertical axis along a radius of the Earth, connecting the root of the plant in the earth to the "infinite expanse of the sky." [17] Growth along this axis always has its veriginous dimensions, for it is also the axis of the gravity of falling bodies. The brief flowering of a vegetal growth is accomplished despite the loads that pull it back to the Earth. We anticipate its collapse, for we know all too well the weight of days on our bodies, the sinking power of gravity that draws us to our grave.

It was the faith of the architect Gaudi that turned the descending force upon itself so that it ascended in the form of a construction of stone, a miraculous lever in the form of a mirrored reflection of a catenary force diagram. The result were buildings that grew up from the Earth with the familiar aspiration of a "vegetal erection." The columns of the architect West are alive with the same vibrancy, the soaring aspect of Gaudi's faith being



PRESSURE BUILDINGS AND BLACKOUTS